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VOC FOR IOP/FN
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1465 SEPTEMBER 17, 1976
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EAST EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE

ANNCR:

IN RECENT SPEECHES, LEADERS OF THE SOVIET UNION, CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND POLAND HAVE GIVEN EXTENDED REVIEWS OF THEIR AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS. HERE WITH AN ANALYSIS IS VOA'S MARK DILLEN:

VOICE:

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE HAVE PERENNIALLY EMPHASIZED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURE -- BUT THE PROSPECT OF AGRICULTURAL FAILURE HAS NEVER ENTIRELY DISAPPEARED. EVEN IN THE MOST PRODUCTIVE SEASONS, THERE IS CONCERN THAT EQUIPMENT WILL FALTER, AND THE CROPS WILL NOT BE HARVESTED, STORED OR PROCESSED IN TIME. DURING THE GROWING SEASON, THERE ARE CONSTANT APPEALS TO WORK HARDER.

EARLY THIS MONTH, LEONID BREZHNEV, EDWARD GIEREK AND LUBOMIR STROUGAL REVIEWED THEIR RESPECTIVE AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS IN SEPARATE, WIDELY-PUBLICIZED SPEECHES. FOR SOVIET PARTY LEADER BREZHNEV, THE OCCASION WAS A TRIP (9/3) TO SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN -- A GRAIN-GROWING REGION THAT SEEMS HEADED FOR A GOOD HARVEST THIS YEAR. POLISH PARTY LEADER GIEREK SPOKE LATER THAT SAME DAY IN A WIDE-RANGING BROADCAST ADDRESS IN SOUTH POLAND. THEN, TWO DAYS LATER (9/5), CZECHOSLOVAK PREMIER STROUGAL GAVE HIS OWN SPEECH ON AGRICULTURE AT A HARVEST FESTIVAL IN BOHEMIA.

TAKEN TOGETHER, THE REPORTS WERE NOT ENCOURAGING, ALTHOUGH MISTER BREZHNEV SAID BETTER WEATHER THIS YEAR HAD PUT SOVIET AGRICULTURE ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY AFTER LAST YEAR'S DISASTROUS HARVEST. EACH LEADER SAID HIS COUNTRY LACKS ENOUGH MEAT; MISTER GIEREK ADMITTED SHORTAGES IN FODDER, GRAIN AND POTATOES; AND MISTER STROUGAL -- PERHAPS THE MOST PESSIMISTIC -- MENTIONED SHORTFALLS IN MILK AND ALMOST ALL KINDS OF FRUIT, VEGETABLES, AND GRAIN.

WHILE THE RECORD-BREAKING DROUGHT THAT HIS HIT MUCH OF EUROPE CAN BE BLAMED FOR SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IN POLAND AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, OTHER FACTORS ARE INVOLVED AS WELL. MISTER GIEREK TOLD HIS PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE LAST WEEK THAT POLAND'S PREDOMINATELY PRIVATE AGRICULTURE MUST BE MADE PROFITABLE FOR FARM OWNERS, AND THE STATE SHOULD BE BETTER ORGANIZED FOR THAT TASK. IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, JUST THIS WEEK (9/13-17) THE AGRICULTURE MINISTER WAS DISMISSED AFTER MISTER STROUGAL BROADLY ATTACKED SHORTCOMINGS IN AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION. MEANWHILE, THE SOVIET PRESS THIS SEASON HAS COMPLAINED THAT HARVESTING EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN POORLY MAINTAINED AND OFTEN IS NOT AVAILABLE AT CRITICAL TIMES.

(OPT) THE FAILURE OF EAST EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE HAS AFFECTED OTHER AREAS OF ECONOMIC LIFE. FOR EXAMPLE, POLISH MEAT EXPORTS ARE COUNTED ON TO EARN FOREIGN CURRENCY TO BUY FOREIGN GRAIN AND WESTERN TECHNOLOGY. BUT WHEN DOMESTIC FODDER PRODUCTION GOES DOWN, SO DOES MEAT PRODUCTION, AND THERE'S LESS MEAT TO EXPORT. WHEN POLAND'S PLAN TO RAISE FOOD PRICES IN JUNE BACKFIRED IN PROTESTS AND RIOTS, THE LEADERSHIP WAS FORCED TO PROMISE PRICE STABILITY AND ONLY GRADUAL INCREASES. (END OPT)

WHEN CROPS FAIL, EAST EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS PLAINLY CANNOT AFFORD TO BUY ENOUGH ABROAD TO MAKE UP FOR THIS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SUBSIDIZING RETAIL PRICES. SO THE COST IS PAID IN SCARCITY AND HOARDING. MOST MOSCOW RESTAURANTS OBSERVE "MEATLESS" THURSDAY, AND MANY SOVIET MARKETS HAVE REDUCED THEIR WORKING HOURS. POLAND, A TRADITIONAL EXPORTER OF SUGAR FROM SUGAR BEETS, IS NOW RATIONING SUGAR. AND MISTER BREZHNEV, WHILE PRAISING THE PROSPECT OF A GRAIN HARVEST CLOSE TO TARGET LEVELS, FAILED TO MENTION THAT SEVERAL MILLION TONS OF GRAIN WILL BE IMPORTED THIS YEAR FROM THE UNITED STATES -- SOME OF IT ALREADY ON ORDER.

IN THE WAKE OF THE JUNE DISORDERS IN POLAND, COMMUNIST LEADERS THROUGHOUT EASTERN EUROPE HAVE TAKEN PAINS TO MOLLIFY CONSUMERS -- AND ARE APPEALING TO PATRIOTISM TO FORESTALL FURTHER TROUBLE. TO THIS END, POLAND'S GIEREK HAS EVEN APPEALED TO POLAND'S CATHOLIC CHURCH FOR SUPPORT -- AND SUGGESTED THE GOVERNMENT WOULD REWARD SUCH SUPPORT WITH COOPERATION IN OTHER FIELDS.

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